



## Punica granatum

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The pomegranate (*Punica granatum*) is a fruit-bearing deciduous shrub or small tree in the family *Lythraceae* that grows between 5 and 8 m (16 and 26 ft) tall.

The fruit is typically in season in the Northern Hemisphere from September to February and in the Southern Hemisphere from March to May. As intact arils or juice, pomegranates are used in baking, cooking, juice blends, meal garnishes, smoothies, and alcoholic beverages, such as cocktails and wine.

The pomegranate originated in the region extending from modern-day Iran through Afghanistan and Pakistan to northern India, and has been cultivated since ancient times throughout the Mediterranean region. It was introduced into Spanish America in the late 16th century and into California by Spanish settlers in 1769.

Today, it is widely cultivated throughout the Middle East and Caucasus region, north and tropical Africa, South Asia, Central Asia, the drier parts of southeast Asia, and parts of the Mediterranean Basin. It is also cultivated in parts of Arizona and California..

The name pomegranate derives from medieval Latin *pōmum* "apple" and *grānātum* "seeded". Possibly stemming from the old French word for the fruit, *pomme-grenade*, the pomegranate was known in early English as "apple of Grenada"—a term which today survives only in heraldic blazons. This is a folk etymology, confusing the Latin *granatus* with the name of the Spanish city of Granada, which derives from Arabic.

Garnet derives from Old French *grenat* by metathesis, from Medieval Latin *granatum* as used in a different meaning "of a dark red color". This derivation may have originated from *pomum granatum*, describing the color of pomegranate pulp, or from *granum*, referring to "red dye, cochineal"

The French term for pomegranate, *grenade*, has given its name to the military grenade.

## Description

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A shrub or small tree growing 6 to 10 m (20 to 33 ft) high, the pomegranate has multiple spiny branches and is extremely long-lived, with some specimens in France surviving for 200 years. *P. granatum* leaves are opposite or subopposite, glossy, narrow oblong, entire, 3–7 cm (1.2–2.8 in) long and 2 cm (0.79 in) broad. The flowers are bright red and 3 cm (1.2 in) in diameter, with three to seven petals. Some fruitless varieties are grown for the flowers alone.

### Fruit, arils and seeds

Botanically, the edible fruit is a berry with seeds and pulp produced from the ovary of a single flower. The fruit is intermediate in size between a lemon and a grapefruit, 5–12 cm (2–5 in) in diameter with a rounded shape and thick, reddish husk.

In mature fruits, the juice obtained by compressing the arils and seeds yields a sour flavor due to low pH (4.4) and high contents of polyphenols, which may cause a red indelible stain on fabrics. Primarily, the pigmentation of pomegranate juice results from the presence of anthocyanins and ellagitannins

## Cultivation

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*P. granatum* is grown for its fruit crop, and as ornamental trees and shrubs in parks and gardens. Mature specimens can develop sculptural twisted-bark multiple trunks and a distinctive overall form. Pomegranates are drought-tolerant, and can be grown in dry areas with either a Mediterranean winter rainfall climate or in summer rainfall climates. In wetter areas, they can be prone to root decay from fungal diseases. They can be tolerant of moderate frost, down to about  $-12\text{ }^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $10\text{ }^{\circ}\text{F}$ ).

### Varieties

*P. granatum* var. *nana* is a dwarf variety of *P. granatum* popularly planted as an ornamental plant in gardens and larger containers, and used as a bonsai specimen tree. It could well be a wild form with a distinct origin.

### Cultivars

*P. granatum* has more than 500 named cultivars, but evidently has considerable synonymy in which the same genotype is named differently across regions of the world.

## Cultural history

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Pomegranate is native to a region from modern day Iran through Afghanistan and Pakistan to northern India.

Pomegranates have been cultivated throughout the Middle East, South Asia, and Mediterranean region for several millennia, and also thrive in the drier climates of California and Arizona.

The pomegranate had been introduced as an exotic to England the previous century, by John Tradescant the elder, but the disappointment that it did not set fruit there led to its repeated introduction to the American colonies, even New England. It succeeded in the South: Bartram received a barrel of pomegranates and oranges from a correspondent in Charleston, South Carolina, 1764. John Bartram partook of "delitious" pomegranates with Noble Jones at Wormsloe Plantation, near Savannah, Georgia.